

Jaime Frederick - First Grade

Jaime Frederick and her then-teaching partner Laura Schwerdt introduced the Fall Festival to first grade. Right away it became a tradition much anticipated by younger children and fondly remembered by older ones. Parents like it too, because they become involved with their children's learning. Like the dad at the festival's tasting station, dutifully recording first graders' "recipe" for pumpkin bread. "Take two pumpkins," they begin, "without the stems. Add sugar."

Other parents oversee math activities disguised as games. Students estimate the weight, then weigh and measure their pumpkins. Elsewhere, children make leaf prints and rubbings, create tissue paper-stuffed pumpkins, decorate scarecrows and generally enjoy all things autumn. Presiding over the fun is Mrs. Frederick, who says, "I love to find the fun, enjoy the kids and have a good time. I try to make learning fun."



She's been making learning fun for 15 years, four of them at Topeka Collegiate. She loves first grade because it's such a critical year. "They become big kids," she says. "They feel big. I use that bigness to challenge them to learn bigger things. I say, 'You used to spell that word this way, but now you're first graders, so you know how to write and spell it correctly.'" The first graders almost burst with the pride of their accomplishment.

"There is huge growth from the beginning of the year to the end," observes Mrs. Frederick. "They take off with their reading, begin developing critical thinking skills, learn addition and subtraction math facts. It's amazing!" Mrs. Frederick enjoys teaching first graders all the time ("They make me laugh!"), but particularly enjoys teaching math and reading. "I love going to the reading lab," she says with a smile, "doing guided reading, working with small groups and encouraging them to reach their highest level they can reach."

Asked what parents can do to help their students succeed, Mrs. Frederick says, "Support the teacher and help with nightly homework. Let your child see you read. Then they get excited about it. If you believe your child will succeed, and the teacher believes, they pick up on that and they will meet expectations. They will succeed."

Mrs. Frederick's connection with first graders is not surprising. "I've always loved kids," she says. As an 11-year-old, she took the Red Cross babysitting course, then took flyers around the neighborhood offering babysitting services. "I went into high school knowing I wanted to be a teacher," she says. "I never changed my mind."